

Folk 201: Oral Literature Analytical Assignment

AKA the Märchen Assignment: Due October 25, 2010

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to use the tools that have been employed by folklorists for the cross-cultural study of Märchen. When it is completed, hopefully you will have acquired both an appreciation for some of the methods of folklore scholarship and concerns about the adequacy of these methods for fully discussing a piece of oral narrative.

CHANGE FROM THE SYLLABUS DESCRIPTION

Because of the size of the class and the amount of material to cover, presentations are no longer feasible for this assignment. The assignment will be due on the same day, but class will cover the last of the Märchen material.

1. Select a Märchen from *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*.

Let me know what you pick, and we'll aim at avoiding duplication.

2. Using the *Motif Index* and the *Tale-Type Index*, find the tale's AT number

3. Find three more versions of the same tale (i.e. with the same AT number) from three (other) cultures

Consult the list of "Folktale Collections in the CBU Library" that I distributed with the syllabus.

4. Using the description in the Aarne-Thompson *Tale Type Index*, compare and contrast the four versions

The *Tale Type Index* (which is on three-hour reserve in the library) provides an embryonic plot and a list of common motifs. All four of your versions have been identified as being of the same type: how are they similar? Where do they diverge? What motifs are common to all, which are absent, and which are idiosyncratic?

If you come across something that strikes you as odd (which is almost the definition of motif) and which is not listed in either the *Tale Type Index* or in the notes accompanying the versions you have found, see if you can find it in Stith Thompson's six-volume *Motif Index* (a copy of which is in the reference library).

Through comparison, you should be able to see why the editors of the collections assigned the respective versions that same AT number: but you might also make a case that how they differ is equally important to how they are similar.

5. Returning to your principal text, analyse its **structure using Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.**

Does the tale correspond to what Propp says? Are there particular functions performed by particular dramatis personae that occur in a particular sequence that, when drained of the specifics

of motif, are shared with virtually every tale? (Remember, Propp's specific range of narratives was the fairy tale, basically AT 300-749: anything outside that range might need to be structured differently. However, one can make a general argument of both 'functions' and 'dramatis personae' for non-fairy tales.)

6. Next, analyse its **composition** using Axel Olrik's "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative"

This is more how the tale is told or performed, rather than how the tale is structured. The distinction is, it could be argued, a false one, but one that can be legitimately employed for purposes of analysis.

7. Now analyse its **theme** according to Bengt Holbek's "The Language of Fairy Tales"

Do you see evolutions in the leading character from one stratus to another?

8. In a short (5-6 pages) write-up, summarise your findings

Take your discoveries from steps 3, 4, and 5 and put them into a larger context. What were the noticeable similarities and differences between your four versions? Were there things about the texts, when compared, that you noticed but which could not be addressed by a type and motif approach? What did the tales themselves offer in a way of insight into the specific cultural contexts in which they were collected? How could these cultural particularities be addressed? For the structural and formal analysis, how effective are they for your particular tale?

Included in the write-up should be a reflection on the process: what you found interesting, what you found tedious, what you found pointless, what you found lacking, what you think yourself unprepared for, and any questions you need to feel resolved.

Motif Index Thompson, Stith. *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, mediaeval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jestbooks and local legends*. Rev. and enl. ed. Six Volumes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.

Reference Section: GR 67 T52 1975.

Also online at

<http://pm.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=motif/motif.00.xml;brand=default>

Tale Type Index Aarne, Antti. *The types of the folktale: a classification and bibliography*. Trans. and Enl. Stith Thompson. 2nd rev. ed. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964.

On Reserve: GR 67 A213 1961.